

Book Review

Exploring Careers in Family Law

by Fred Thrasher

Family Law Careers, by Sara Vlajcic, American Bar Association (part of the *ABA Career Series*), 1998.

This new addition to the ABA Career Series provides a comprehensive, insightful look at the contemporary practice of family law. The author, Sara Vlajcic, brings her expertise to craft a highly accessible volume on family law; she was the founding managing editor of the ABA Family Law Section's magazine, *Family Advocate*, and has experience as a writer, editor, and reporter. The topics covered will prove useful to law students and attorneys alike as they pursue opportunities and practice in this challenging field.

Vlajcic points out that the practice of family law, while once limited to divorce and custody work, now includes adoption, genetics, reproduction, children's rights, elder law, tax planning, and mediation. Profiles of attorneys in these and other subspecialties provide valuable perspectives. In addition, societal changes (e.g., the demise of the nuclear family, family violence and abuse) and recent developments in practice (i.e., development of the no-fault divorce, equitable distribution of assets, mediation, custody and support issues, the development of family court systems, the necessity of continuing legal education) have combined to make family law an exciting and challenging specialty.

She describes the career characteristics of a typical family lawyer based on the results of a 1997 survey of the 11,000-member ABA Family Law

Section. Notable among these characteristics is the fact that the majority of family lawyers are sole practitioners or in firms of three or fewer attorneys. She also points out that family law is one of the few areas in which there are equal numbers of male and female practitioners.

The chapter entitled "Do You Have What It Takes?" provides a particularly valuable service to law students considering a career in the field. Vlajcic identifies several personality traits (including extroversion, enjoying client contact, empathic listening, and, a perennial favorite, patience), and other factors that help practitioners succeed: objectivity, understanding/insight, legal ability, maturity, work ethic, and the right attitude. A chapter on "Advice to Students" focuses on recommended academic preparation, certification opportunities, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, and obtaining experience in the private sector, court, legal aid, and social service settings.

The text is peppered with comments from family law practitioners providing realistic first-hand comments, although by the end of the book the comments become a bit repetitive. Vlajcic concludes with several quotes from practitioners answering the question "Do you have any advice for someone considering this field?"

Acknowledging that family law is a high-stakes practice, Vlajcic devotes significant time to handling stress, ways to cope, and balancing work and family. She provides a variety of practical pointers from being selective about which cases practitioners select to setting boundaries with clients.

Reprinted from *NALP Bulletin*, March 1999.

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With appendices that include a bibliography, a general career planning guide, a list of professional groups and organizations, and sources of specialty certification for lawyers, *Family Law Careers* is a must for every career planning library. ■

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